

State Soil Conservation Board Business Plan

2010-2015

Rev 1/8/12

Rev 3/6/13

Rev 1/6/14

The mission of the State Soil Conservation Board (SSCB) is to provide information, advice and consultation to soil and water conservation district supervisors to assist them in carrying out their powers and programs.

Key Actions/Progress: The SSCB will also provide policy and funding direction to the Indiana Department of Agriculture-Division of Soil Conservation (ISDA-DSC) on the administration of the Clean Water Indiana Program (CWI), to help address statewide natural resource concerns **as identified in local soil and water conservation district business plans.**

The SSCB has identified the following as statewide priority natural resource concerns to be addressed over the next five years:

- o **Soil Quality Degradation/Soil Health** which includes the loss of top soil due to erosion, the depletion of organic matter, as well as soil compaction and other soil biology impacts that degrade soil quality.
- o **Water Quality Impairments** including sediment, nutrients, pesticides, *E-coli* and other non-point sources of water pollution found in our streams, rivers and lakes.
- o **Other soil and water related natural resources concerns** including forest lands, wildlife habitat areas, pasture and forage lands and air quality.

Priority Watersheds:

There are geographical areas within all watersheds of Indiana that have critical natural resource concerns related to soil and water conservation. The SSCB will work with the ISDA-DSC, districts and all partners to address these concerns. However, the SSCB will give special attention and assistance to initiatives in the following priority watersheds:

- o **Highland-Pigeon, Lower East Fork White, Lower Wabash, Lower White, Middle Wabash-Busseron, Middle Wabash-Deer, Middle Wabash-Little Vermillion, Tippecanoe, Upper East Fork White, Upper Wabash, and Upper White Watersheds.**

The SSCB will continue to support the existing Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in these watersheds.

- o **Wabash River Watershed**

In a special effort to help address the national concern about nutrient loading which are causing the hypoxia problems in the Gulf of Mexico, the SSCB will continue to assist in the implementation of CREP in the Wabash River Watershed. The SSCB will also continue to assist USDA with the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) which includes a portion of the Wabash River Basin in Indiana.

- o **Western Lake Erie Basin**

We will continue to assist the Western Lake Erie Basin Partnership and our conservation partners in Indiana with efforts to reduce sediment and nutrients entering the Maumee River and ultimately the western basin of Lake Erie. Sediment in the mouth of the Maumee River must be removed at a high cost every year to keep the Port of Toledo open to shipping (including grains). Nutrient reductions especially reduction of dissolved

reactive phosphorus loading into the lake is needed in order to reduce blue-green algal blooms in Lake Erie. Several districts and partners will be utilizing special funding available under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to implement projects that will reduce sediment and nutrient runoff from entering the bay from Indiana.

- o **Other Watersheds**

- Iroquois Watershed

- Ohio River Basin

We will continue to monitor other watersheds across the State of Indiana for future inclusion into SSCB priority watersheds.

In a strategic effort to address the top three resource concerns identified above, the SSCB has developed the following goals and strategies. These goals and strategies are consistent with the board's general authority and duties outlined in the District Law as well as its specific authority to provide direction to the Indiana State Department of Agriculture-Division of Soil Conservation on the administration of the Clean Water Indiana Program:

- o **By 2011 work with IN Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) and other water quality monitoring agencies and organizations, as well as the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to share baseline data of current pollution load conditions.**

- Share data with Districts to help them identify priority areas. **On-going**

- Help to gauge the environmental impact of soil and water conservation efforts. **On-going**

- IDEM is a regularly contributing agency within the Indiana Conservation Partnership therefore the SSCB and ISDA interact with them regularly.

- The Division of Soil Conservation along with IDEM has been developing the State Nutrient Reduction Strategy. As part of this effort, we are gaining a better understanding of trends and watershed treatment priorities through study of models and communication with USGS.

- The Nutrient Reduction Strategy is a living document, which will continue to be updated by partners.**

- o **By 2012 have a tracking tool/model in place for measuring load reductions as practices and technologies are applied on the land. **Complete****

- Work with the ISDA-DSC to establish mechanism for tracking load reductions.

- Strongly encourage the ISDA-DSC to have all their technical staff using the reduction tracking tool. All ISDA Staff **and SWCD technicians** are reporting practices implemented via SharePoint along with estimated load reductions.

- Require districts to use the same tracking tool for reporting practices applied with CWI grant funding assistance.

- All districts that have received 2012 or 2013 CWI Multi-District Watershed Project Grants are now required to report the practices implemented via SharePoint and with the help of ISDA Technical Staff also estimate and report load reductions.

- Encourage districts and other partners to use the reduction measuring tool for practices and technologies applied with assistance from other programs.

- We now have a model in place to estimate load reductions within the CREP watersheds and this expands our ability to communicate bmp effectiveness.

For example: CREP has contributed (on average) to the estimated reduction of sediments by 8 Million pounds/year, and nitrogen – 13,000 pounds/year, and phosphorus – 6,000 pounds/year (estimated assumption... this equates to potentially 2 Million pounds of algae that did not form/or over 65 tri-axle dump truck loads of algae).

- o **By 2012 provide districts with a standardized reporting procedure for reporting income and expenses, accomplishments, federal, state and local dollars leveraged as well as state and district program needs for the coming year.**

ICP accomplishments report used to highlight district success stories along with state and federal funding received in each district.

All districts entering annual financial report through new State Board of Accounts Gateway web based reporting system. **Additionally, districts are submitting the Annual Financial Report to the State Soil Conservation Board.**

- o **By 2012 the State Soil Conservation Board and ISDA-DSC staff will work with the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD) and other Indiana Conservation Partnership (ICP) partners in developing a reporting format.**

SSCB will annually provide a consolidated report to the general assembly including program and funding needs.

25% complete thru SharePoint tracking system. Need to move this into generating a report.

A report on CWI Grant accomplishments for 2011 was prepared by ISDA-DSC and sent to legislators by IASWCD.

ISDA-DSC will send 2013 annual report to general assembly.

- o **By 2013 there will be a measurable increase in the number of district supervisors actively engaged in district program planning and development, community outreach, local, state and federal conservation policy and legislative affairs.**

Continue to support the Leadership Institute four Corners of Leadership Workshops series.

Work with the Leadership Institute Program Committee and the ICP Leadership Development Workgroup to identify additional training needs and assist with implementing additional training based on needs identified and prioritized.

Continue to work with the ICP Leaders to develop and implement the draft 5 Star Program proposed by the ICP Leadership Workgroup.

Develop a scorecard for recognizing districts that increase their local program capacity, accomplishments and accountability, and in turn incrementally increase their state match over and above the \$10,000 currently provided for operations based on their scorecard results.

Three Leadership Workshops held in 2011; twenty graduates in 2011

Two workshops held in 2012; five graduates in 2012

Two workshops held in 2013. One cancelled.

Seven graduates in 2013.

5 Star Program/Scorecard on hold until Task Force completes their information gathering and recommendations and the SSCB determine its specific actions to take on the Task Force Report.

The board will look into the IDEM capacity program and explore alternatives.

Deadline Verification Tool implemented in 2013. Districts must meet minimum requirements as defined by Indiana Code and grant guidelines in order to receive competitive grants and training reimbursements.

o By 2014 there will be a measurable increase in the number of districts employing district staff with skills in program development and revenue enhancement (ie; grant writing and project management), adult education, technical assistance, marketing and public relations

Provide special training targeted to the training needs of district program managers.

Work with the ICP to continue to develop and implement the technical training program initiated by ISDA-DSC with assistance from Ray Ledgerwood in 2009. This training program will be based on the plan laid out in the timeline developed in our ICP planning meeting and subsequently developed "white paper" developed by a sub-committee for this initiative.

Pursue opportunities for joint training with partners as well as opportunities to utilize trainers from other partners and states.

Investigate and evaluate training programs already in place in other states that could be modified for use in Indiana.

Provide CWI incentive grants to districts for the purpose of developing or adding staff capacity for program development, revenue enhancement, etc. if funds are available.

Offer specific CWI incentive grants to limited resource districts willing to share program development and/or technical staff if funds are available.

Skill Inventory and Training Needs Inventory requested of all Technical Staff in 2011 and again in 2013 for new employees.

Program Coordinator contracted by the partnership in 2012 to promote and manage the Professional Training and Certification Program.

Technical Review Board (TeRBo) continues to work on trainings offered to ICP. The SSCB committed \$25,000 in 2013 to support this effort.

o By 2015 there will be a measurable increase in the number of joint sediment and nutrient reduction projects among districts.

Offer specific CWI grants for joint district projects targeted at sediment and nutrient reduction if funds are available.

The SSCB has been offering CWI Multi-District Watershed Project Grants since the pilot grants were offered in 2011.

The SSCB approved 5 multi-district watershed project grants in 2011, 17 in 2012 and 9 in 2013 for a total of 31 to date.

o Work with ISDA-DSC, IASWCD, and local districts to Increase in the number of cooperative conservation projects with non-governmental organization and private industry.

Several districts have active projects underway in cooperation with non-government organizations. In addition many districts receive great support from private industry sources to help cover costs of workshops, field days and other educational events.

The SSCB has places some priority on grant applications that outline planned participation in their watershed projects by many partners, especially non-traditional partners when selecting CWI grant recipients.

Continue to support the Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (CCSI).

The SSCB has provided \$554,000 of CWI funds through a contract with IASWCD support the CCSI since it began in 2011.

SSCB will review and consider future of funding of CCSI.

o Explore opportunities to work with Certified Crop Advisors (CCAs) and private sector to help promote agronomic conservation practices and technologies.

Provide opportunities for division employees to increase their proficiency and assistance in promoting agronomic conservation practices and technologies.

Division staff are attending trainings and gaining proficiency.

Several active CWI funded watershed projects involve active participation by Certified Crop Advisors.

o By 2015, SWCD's with limited resources are actively pursuing the benefits of and opportunities to consolidate.

Provide education to districts regarding benefits and opportunities of merging.

Provide special CWI incentive grants to limited resource districts that are willing to merge to increase program capacity and effectiveness. Consider offering an incentive of two times the current state match for each of the merged districts for first year and then 1 ½ times the combined matching grant each year thereafter if funds are available. SWCD Coordination Task Force has been formed to address this goal.

One of the three recommended options that came out of the Conservation Beyond 2016 Task Force Report for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of conservation districts in delivering conservation programs locally was consolidation of ICP partners including districts based on a watershed or multi-district structure. ~~No action has been taken by the SSCB to date relative to the strategy above to offer an incentive to limited resources districts that are willing to merge.~~

In 2013, a subcommittee was put together to develop a set of recommendations to the SSCB to move forward with new conservation delivery models. The SSCB approved two pilot project options.

1. Concentrated District Support Specialist
2. Executive Director

Districts may apply for one of these options to test a new delivery model in February 2014.

o By 2015 annually increase federal leveraged funds by an average of 5% per year for conservation implementation in the state

Continue to commit state matching dollars for CREP from CWI funds. (On-going)

Continue to work with the partners to leverage federal funding from all federal sources. (On-going)

Work with our partners to develop a strategic plan to expand CREP to other areas of the state.

Work with the ICP and other traditional and non-traditional partners to enroll 26,250 acres into CREP.

A total of 8,150 acres has been enrolled in CREP as of October, 2013 with a little over \$1.7 CWI matching funds invested in 874 contracts with landowners/operators.

ISDA and FSA are working together to develop a targeted, watershed approach for advertizing and marketing of the program.

o **Key actions for 2014 to make progress in implementing each the goals**

- Continue to solidify partnership.
- Make a concerted effort to help IDEM and DNR become fully vested partners in the ICP.
- Meet with top leadership of ISDA and other state government officials as appropriate to discuss district needs and Clean Water Indiana funding.
- **Support the division in maintaining staff to provide district assistance.**
- Initiate discussions with IDEM and ISDH about septic issues.
- Continue to improve communication with districts by occasionally holding board meeting out in the regions areas of the state and by the use of the ISDA-DSC websites, partner newsletters, webinars, etc.
- **ISDA and SSCB will utilize SharePoint to foster open communications.**
- Pursue opportunities to meet with other state and local government organizations and agencies and others dealing with soil and water issues.
- Continue to encourage Supervisor led group/committee to explore consolidation
- Need legislative changes. Agree to do investigation.
- **Identify funding priorities.**

o **Desired Outcomes for the State Soil Conservation Board Business Plan**

- Clean drinking water
- Clean rivers, lakes and streams
- More productive soils
- Enhanced quality of life
- Increased cooperation with partnership
- Improved soil and water quality
- Districts have increased capacity to deliver conservation programs locally
- Stronger state economy
- Expanded partnerships and conservation partners\
- **Soil Health**